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Summer Brings Added Risk of Drowning

Drowning 2nd Leading Cause of Injury Death for Young Utah Children

(Salt Lake City, UT) – One year ago this month, five Utah children ages 15 and under lost their lives in separate drowning incidents. Most of these drownings were typical in that the toddlers drowned while they were out of their parents' sight and the teen deaths each took place among a group of peers. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) reports that, among Utah children ages 14 and under, drowning is the second leading cause of injury-related death.

Lack of proper supervision is almost always a factor in the drownings of young children. "There are so many ways a child can drown and it can happen so fast parents must be constantly aware of what their children are doing," said Trisha Keller, Manager of the UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program. "They can die in seconds in a bathtub, backyard pond, fast-moving creek, or a community or residential pool - even with lifeguards present."

According to UDOH death certificate data, there were 10 drowning-related deaths among children ages 1-16 between May and August of 2006. This represents 77% of drowning deaths for the same age group for all of 2006. In most cases, the person who was supposed to be watching the child reported that they looked away, answered the phone, or left the area for "just a minute." In some cases where toddlers wandered away from their homes and into the water, it was because a parent was unaware their little one had learned to unlock the door. Family gatherings are a particularly high risk drowning situation for young children because, though there are many adults around, no one in particular is designated to be the "child watcher."

For older children and teens, the problem is often that victims overestimate their swimming ability. Teens are most at risk in open water and boys are more likely to overestimate their swimming ability and take chances, particularly when swimming with friends. Peer pressure likely plays a role in many teen drowning deaths.

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For parents and caregivers, water safety tips that can prevent drowning are:

- Actively supervise children in and around water.
- Where there's water, designate an adult "child watcher" during parties and family gatherings.
- Don't allow or expect children to supervise other children in water settings.
- Never leave a young child alone in the bathtub without adult supervision.
- Warn teenagers of the risks of overestimating their swimming abilities.
- Install four-sided isolation fencing, at least five feet high, equipped with self-closing and self-latching gates, around a home pool or spa.
- Always have your child wear the right size life jacket when on a boat, near open bodies of water or when participating in water sports.
- All family members should wear a life jacket while on a boat.
- Begin teaching children to swim after age four.
- Never allow your child to dive into water less than nine feet deep.
- Empty all containers (buckets, wading pools, etc.) immediately after use and store out of reach.
- To avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, do not allow anyone to swim behind a houseboat with its engine running.
- To avoid drain entanglement and entrapment in pools and spas, install anti-entrapment devices.

Make this summer a safe and fun time for your children. For more information on drowning prevention and other outdoor recreation safety tips go to <http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp/>.

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